

# Press Release

Contact: Bridget Barron  
Phone: (308) 237-5728

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **2020 NORTH PLATTE CHOKEPOINT TEST FLOW RELEASE**

KEARNEY, NE: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in coordination with the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP), plans to implement a “North Platte Chokepoint Test Flow Release” using Environmental Account (EA) water from Lake McConaughy beginning July 13, 2020. The PRRIP is a cooperative basin-wide program to assist in the recovery of threatened and endangered species in the Platte River including the whooping crane, piping plover, interior least tern, and pallid sturgeon. EA water is dedicated to instream flow purposes, specifically providing benefits to the threatened and endangered species that are the focus of the PRRIP’s actions.

The North Platte “chokepoint” is that reach of the North Platte River extending a few miles on either side of the Highway 83 bridge where the encroachment of invasive phragmites vegetation has significantly reduced the river’s flow capacity at flood stage relative to conditions that were present in the late 1990s when PRRIP objectives were originally developed. One PRRIP objective is to achieve a flow of 3,000 cfs at the North Platte chokepoint while remaining below flood stage. The current National Weather Service flood stage for the North Platte River at North Platte is 6.0 feet or about 1,930 cubic feet per second (cfs).

The North Platte chokepoint test flow release will allow the PRRIP to accomplish two critical tasks: (1) test the performance of the State Channel Berm, which was rehabilitated in 2018 and is designed to redirect high flows on the North Platte River away from residential areas along North River Road, particularly near North Washboard Road, and (2) collect extensive surface water and groundwater data and visual observations. This information will be reviewed by the National Weather Service to determine if flood stage should be increased to 6.5 feet or about 2,770 cfs. PRRIP and partners will be on site to collect data and observe river conditions throughout the duration of the test flow release.

Planning for the test flow release was a collaborative effort between PRRIP stakeholders and local officials, including the USFWS EA Manager (Tom Econopouly), PRRIP Executive Director (Jason Farnsworth) and staff, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID), Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD), National Weather Service, Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, City of North Platte, and Lincoln County Emergency Management. These parties will be

in close coordination during the test flow release and will be prepared to scale back or terminate the EA release if required. The partners will monitor weather as well as water level conditions in and around North Platte to determine if changes to the test flow release implementation plan are needed. The following summarizes current expectations for the North Platte chokepoint test flow release:

- Currently, flows for the North Platte River at North Platte are at or near flood stage. The flows are associated with CNPPID operations to meet irrigation and hydropower demands and an ongoing EA release to meet target flows at Grand Island.
- Flow releases for the North Platte Chokepoint Test will occur from July 13 through July 29 (17 days).
- The North Platte River at North Platte is expected to be at or above the current National Weather Service flood stage of 6.0 feet until July 31 because of the North Platte Chokepoint Test.
- The controlled release of EA water for the test flow release is designed to evaluate conditions at river stages of 6.0 ft (1,930 cfs), 6.5 ft (2,770 cfs), and 6.75 ft (3,250 cfs), beginning on July 15.
- The planned stages will occur during the following times:
  - Present – July 18: 6.0 ft
  - July 19 – July 27: 6.5 ft
  - July 28 – July 31: 6.75 ft
- Flows are not expected to exceed flood stage at any gage on the North Platte River or Platte River other than the North Platte River at North Platte.

The PRRIP has liability insurance in place in the event of any associated damages related to the implementation of the North Platte chokepoint test flow release. The PRRIP is committed to restoration of habitat for threatened and endangered species in the Central Platte River, while at the same time protecting human health and safety and preventing damage to associated land along the river.

Contacts for more information:

Tom Econopouly, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service EA Manager

Office Phone: (303) 236-4484

E-mail: [Thomas\\_Econopouly@fws.gov](mailto:Thomas_Econopouly@fws.gov)

Jason Farnsworth, Executive Director, Platte River Recovery Implementation Program

Office Phone: (308) 237-5728

E-mail: [farnsworthj@headwaterscorp.com](mailto:farnsworthj@headwaterscorp.com)